

BEFORE THE  
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20554

In the matter of:

Telecommunications Relay Services  
And Speech-to-Speech Services for  
Individuals with Hearing and Speech  
Disabilities.

CC Docket No. 98-67

**COMMENTS OF THE CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES  
COMMISSION AND OF THE PEOPLE OF THE  
STATE OF CALIFORNIA ON THE PUBLIC NOTICE**

The California Public Utilities Commission and the People of the State of California (California or CPUC) respectfully submit as our Comments the attached Report to us from California's Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program in response to the *Public Notice* issued by the Consumer Information Bureau of the Federal Communications Commission (CIB) on June 29, 2001. In the *Public Notice*, the CIB seeks additional comment on the provision of improved Telecommunications Relay

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Service (TRS). Specifically, the CIB seeks comment concerning the benefits, cost recovery, minimum standards, IP capabilities, security, and outreach regarding TRS via the Internet (IP Relay).

Respectfully submitted,

GARY COHEN  
LIONEL B. WILSON  
HELEN M. MICKIEWICZ  
JONADY HOM SUN

By: /s/ JONADY HOM SUN

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Jonady Hom Sun

505 Van Ness Ave.  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
Phone: (415) 703-1470  
Fax: (415) 703-2262

Attorneys for the  
Public Utilities Commission  
State Of California

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**The Report of the Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program  
to the California Public Utilities Commission on  
Federal Communications Commission Docket No. 98-67  
Consumer Information Bureau's Request for Additional  
Comment on the Provision of Improved  
Telecommunications Relay Service**

This document includes comments provided to the CPUC by California's Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program, which is the program arm of the CPUC which administers the California Relay Service (CRS). These comments respond to the main issue areas addressed in the CIB's June 29<sup>th</sup> request pertaining to the provision of TRS calls over the Internet, or IP Relay.

**Benefits**

IP Relay offers many benefits to relay users over the present methods of accessing TRS. One of the most important benefits is the ability to use the Internet while placing a relay call. Most residential Internet users use their phone line and a modem to connect to the Internet. This means that a phone call cannot be placed simultaneously with connecting to the Internet. With IP Relay, an Internet user can stay connected to the Internet while simultaneously placing a relay call, eliminating the need to disconnect from the Internet to make a relay call. This is a tremendous convenience and time-saving benefit for TRS users.

Another benefit to users of IP Relay is cost savings. Voice telephone users may call anywhere in the world using their Internet Service Provider through voice over IP. IP Relay extends this benefit to users who are deaf and hard of hearing.

IP Relay users in California have reported that IP Relay is more reliable in terms of communication clarity. While TTY relay calls frequently result in garbled or scrambled messages, IP Relay calls are clean and clear.

One important benefit of IP Relay is that, if multiple providers offer the service, TRS users will be able to choose their IP Relay provider on every call. Because there will be no way for providers to offer the service only to certain states or to block calls from certain states, users anywhere will be able to take advantage of service offered anywhere. Relay users now only have this benefit of choice on interstate and international relay calls (except that relay users in California have two providers to choose from on every call), but IP Relay users will have this benefit on every call. The jurisdiction of the call won't matter.

Offerings associated with IP Relay, such as split screens, conference calls, and gateways to other text telephone protocols (such as EDT, CCITT V.21, DTMF, and Minitel) could expand the usability of IP Relay by making it available to a broader range of text telephone users, and especially expanding the international calling capabilities which are already inherent in the Internet. Vendors would be motivated to offer these services if the potential IP Relay user base is large and if vendors can recover the costs of their investment.

One drawback of IP Relay is that currently it cannot be as broadly available to the deaf, hard of hearing, and speech disabled communities as is traditional TRS. This is due to the fact that IP Relay requires a computer. While most states now provide free or low-

cost TTYs as part of their state equipment distribution programs, no states currently provide computers as part of those programs.

### Cost Recovery

California supports the reimbursement of IP Relay minutes from the Interstate TRS Fund at least as a temporary funding mechanism to encourage development. Once the service grows in usage and some studies can be performed to estimate the jurisdiction of IP Relay calls, an interstate and intrastate proportionate distribution formula could be developed, similar to what is used now for toll free calls. Without some sort of a “log on” or “registration” process, relay providers will not know the location of the call originator. This, however, should not create a barrier to reimbursement, just as the lack of a terminating location of a toll free call has not created a barrier to reimbursement.

The Interstate TRS Administrative Board should be asked by the FCC to develop a formula for reimbursement of IP Relay calls, as it has done for VRS, STS, and traditional TRS. The reimbursement rate should be set at a level which encourages providers to offer the service. Only the proliferation of vendors will create an environment in which new service enhancements are introduced.

### Minimum Standards

IP Relay providers should be required to meet the same functional standards as required by traditional TRS providers, to the extent such standards are technologically feasible. Almost all of the requirements pertaining directly to the TRS communication assistants (CAs) would also apply to IP Relay CAs. For example, IP Relay CAs should be required to type 60 wpm, to type verbatim unless instructed otherwise, and to conduct

the call as requested by the caller. Other existing requirements for TRS might not be as readily measurable or achievable for IP Relay, such as the 85/10 standard for average speed of answer. Just as traditional TRS operates with a standard of “functional equivalence” to a voice telephone call, IP Relay should operate with a standard of functional equivalence to an Internet telephone call.

### IP Capabilities

IP Relay providers could be encouraged to offer caller profile features which allow the CA to quickly identify the calling preferences of the person initiating or receiving the call. These caller profiles could eventually be used on the outbound leg of a voice originated call to identify users who prefer to receive their relay calls over the Internet rather than via TTY. IP Relay providers should also be encouraged to offer VCO and HCO on IP Relay calls. Any of these IP Relay features which involve the use of voice over the Internet may require specific customer premises equipment, but the features should be available for users possessing the appropriate technology and equipment.

### Security

IP Relay users should be guaranteed the same standards of security and confidentiality that apply to traditional TRS. On the human side of the equation, confidentiality requirements for the CAs on IP Relay calls can be equal to confidentiality requirements for CAs on traditional TRS calls. On the technical side of the equation, IP Relay providers will need to take steps to use technology to establish firewalls or other similar provisions to protect the privacy of the IP Relay callers and their personal identification information so that no aspect of relayed conversation is retrievable in any form.

## Outreach

IP Relay providers should be required to provide consumer outreach and education to the public about their services. Since this type of consumer education can probably not be done through the traditional method of publicizing numbers in telephone directories and using bill inserts, providers will need to determine other broad advertising methods. The FCC should not require specific customer education and outreach methods, because different IP Relay providers will have different capabilities. Some IP Relay providers might be established telecommunications companies or Internet Service Providers with access to extensive customer lists. Other providers might be non-profit organizations with no retail or “customer” presence. Establishing specific outreach standards or dollar requirements would not treat all providers fairly.